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SIPDIS

DEPT. FOR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA MEETS WITH FM TKESHELASHVILI

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a May 9 meeting with DAS Bryza, Foreign Minister Eka Tkeshelashvili expressed appreciation for the strong support from the United States in response to recent Russian actions in Abkhazia. She said it was clear that the Russian troops in Abkhazia were no longer performing a peacekeeping operation and called for a strong diplomatic push from the west to deter Russia from further actions. She noted that steps toward a peaceful settlement of the conflict would be futile unless Russia withdraws its additional peacekeepers and repeals President Putin's April 16 instructions and warned of the potential for a provocation on the ground that could spark a military confrontation. DAS Bryza agreed, saying it was clear that Russia was no longer acting like mediator in the conflict and assured her that the United States was engaged at the very highest levels to send a clear message to Russia that there will be consequences for further destabilizing actions in Abkhazia. He stressed, however, that a military campaign to reclaim Abkhazia would result in the loss of Abkhazia and U.S. support and outlined steps he thought could reinvigorate the peace process and bring Abkhazia back under Georgian authority. End summary.

Russian actions a violation of sovereign Georgia

¶2. (C) Foreign Minister Eka Tkeshelashvili thanked DAS Bryza for the strong support Georgia has received in response to the recent Russian actions in Abkhazia. She added that the EU statements have also been strong, but despite this show of support, the situation on the ground has not changed. It was clear to everyone, she said, that Russian troops were no longer conducting a peacekeeping operation, calling the presence of the paratrooper battalion and its artillery a violation of the 1994 Moscow cease-fire agreement. These troops were brought in against the will of sovereign Georgia, she said, adding that all future diplomatic efforts by the west need to concentrate on preventing further Russian provocations and securing the withdrawal of these extra heavily armed peacekeeping troops. She called the current situation "alarming," because it would be very easy for a provocation on the ground to spark a broader military confrontation. Deputy Foreign Minister Bokeria echoed this sentiment, saying that given the buildup of Russian military forces and the current high levels of tension, war could happen at any moment. FM Tkeshelashvili said she thought all future steps toward a settlement of the conflict would be futile until the extra peacekeepers are withdrawn and Russia repeals Putin's April 16 instructions authorizing links between Russian government officials and the de-facto authorities.

¶3. (C) DAS Bryza said that the United States agreed. It was clear that Russia was no longer acting as a mediator in the conflict. He assured Tkeshelashvili that the United States was engaged at the very highest levels on this issue and would send a clear message to Russia that there would be concrete consequences for Russia's actions. Georgia, Bryza said, was in a stronger position vis-a-vis NATO Membership

Action Plan (MAP), because even the Europeans see that Russia has gone too far. Bryza noted that during a May 5 meeting in Paris at the Elysee, presidential advisor Damian Loras had told him continued Russian provocations coupled with Georgian restraint would likely sway Sarkozy in favor of MAP. The Abkhaz are also unhappy with the current situation, he said, and the U.S.'s goal was to exploit this and create the conditions for a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

Tkeshelashvili said she understood the U.S. position, but reiterated that it would be very easy for a provocation to happen on the ground and argued that Russia will continue to behave provocatively if they do not see an international response.

UAV flights and the way forward on the peace process

¶ 14. (C) DAS Bryza told Tkeshelashvili that Secretary Rice had clearly indicated to Russian FM Lavrov the U.S. position that Georgian unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) flights over Abkhazia are not a provocation. These patrols actually increase security by providing Georgia with a clearer picture of what is happening in Abkhazia, particularly outside the area patrolled by UN observers. Bryza said that the U.S. would like to see UNOMIG UAVs conducting patrols over the conflict zone and asked whether the Georgian government would support these patrols. DFM Bokeria questioned the effectiveness of UNOMIG UAV flights, given UNOMIG's low credibility in Georgia, and said that there would need to be clear goals established for such flights.

¶ 15. (C) DAS Bryza then discussed next steps for the peace process, steps agreed to by the western Friends at a May 6

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meeting in Paris that he would also present to Abkhaz de-facto president Bagapsh during his meeting with Bagapsh on May 10 (septel). Bryza said that Georgia and the west need to send a strong public message that Russia is no longer a facilitator in the Group of Friends and it is necessary to develop a complementary format that will support a political settlement through direct Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations. The west also needs to renew its push for an international police force in Gali while Georgia engages the Abkhaz to elaborate President Saakashvili's peace plan, especially its constitutional guarantees of autonomy. Bryza suggested that a new forum could be created that would include the Black Sea Trust Fund, as well as EU, OSCE, UN, Ukraine, Turkey and the current members of the Group of Friends to support the Georgian peace plan and encourage direct Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations. The Group of Friends would continue to exist, but the primary forum for negotiations would be expanded to this new and expanded group, in which no country would have a veto. DFM Bokeria said that while these were all good ideas, he was skeptical they would work now that Russia had solidified its position in Abkhazia. Bryza suggested working these ideas into the next UNOMIG mandate renewal. If Russia balks at the changes, he said, the west would acquiesce to not renewing UNOMIG's mandate, which would make the Russian peacekeepers occupiers. The idea would be to force Russia into accepting these changes. Both Tkeshelashvili and Bokeria were receptive to the plan, with Bokeria noting that it would be important for the EU to state publicly that Russia is no longer a facilitator in the Friends and could no longer have a veto over the process.

¶ 16. (U) DAS Bryza cleared this cable.

TEFFT